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Ogonek, Vol XXIX, No 24, 1951, p 13.

CULTIVATION OF BOTANICAL DRUGS IN THE USSR

S. Smuglyy

Extensive correspondence on local botanical drugs used in popular medicine is being received at the All-Union Scientific Research Institute of Medicinal and Essential Oil-Bearing Plants. All information contained in letters sent to the institute is examined. If it is warranted, new medicinal plants are tested and planted at the institute's experimental fields, located at Bitets near Moscow. Expeditions consisting of associates of the institute (botanists, chemists, and pharmacologists) are regularly sent to all parts of the country. Altogether, USSR scientists, at present, have earmarked 1,500 species of plants for investigation in the near future.

In the search for new medicinal plants, P. Ye. Massagetov, botanist, found Shirokolistyy Krestovinik Droadleafed groundsel, ragwort of aster family; Senecio Carduaceae in the Caucasus mountains at an altitude 500-2,000 m. This plant yields the alkaloid platyphyllin, a remarkable remedy for many gastric, intestinal, and ulcer diseases. Platyphyllin serves as a substitute for atropin and there is a considerable demand for it. The problem of cultivating Shirokolistnyy Krestovnik has been successfully solved.

The institute has also investigated the chemical composition, and developed methods of cultivation, in the case of such important plants as Zheltushnik Seryy [grey swallowwort, Cynachum vincetoxicum-Asclepias Asclepidaceae; or Erysimum Brassicaceae and Pusyrnik Volosistyy [hairy bladderwort], which are used in the treatment of heart diseases, as well as Sushenitsa Bolotnaya [Gnaphalium uliginosum], which is effective in some internal diseases.

As compared with the time before the revolution, the cultivation of medicinal plants in the USSR has been expanded considerably. While these plantings in Russia occupied only several hundred desystimas before the revolution, at present medicinal plants are cultivated over an area covering tens of thousands of hectares. Besides kolkhozes which grow botanical drugs, 12 special sovkhozes for the cultivation of medicinal plants have been created.

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The work done by Soviet scientists on ginseng Panax ginseng is of interest. They developed methods for the cultivation of this plant, which grows exclusively from seeds that germinate very slowly and yield sprouts only after two-four winters in the ground. Experiments showed that cultivation of ginseng can be carried out in all forest regions of Primorskiy Kray.

A plant whose fruit has been used for a long time by taiga hunters occurs widely in the Far East of the USSR. This plant is Limonnik Schizandra chinensis whose berries stimulate the resistance of the organism to hardships. At present, Schizandra chinensis is being used medically for stimulating heart action, for combating exhaustion and sleepiness, and for restoring the recuperative powers of the organism.

Ginseng, the nature of whose active principles has now been clarified, exhibits tonic action similar to that of Schizandra chinensis (G. Kurentsova, "Medical Flora of Primorskiy Kray," Meditsinskiy Rabotnik, No 39-955, 31 May 1951)

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